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**Title:** Send It To Them! ... (Postage-Free)

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Every year with the return of Great Lent, I sit down to perform my due diligence as a priest and type out an article for you on fasting. Except ... I have learned that almost nothing I say will change anyone's food habits. Those who fast will fast. Those who dine richly will order the bacon double cheeseburger today and promise to skip a meal tomorrow.

And so, rather than making you feel guilty for enjoying your food, I have decided to offer you ways to make a difference in the world that still honors some of the spirit of fasting, so that you might not lose out on a reward. Last year my topic was making the choice to eat cruelty-free by selecting meat, fish, and dairy that comes from farms and processors where the animals are not horribly abused in the usual ways. Only a few of you responded positively to that message. But those few were enough for me to try again on another angle!

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If your Mom or Dad were like mine, more than once they told you to "Finish your dinner: the starving kids in China would be glad to have it." It was not I, but one of my brothers, who was the first in my family to come up with that clever retort: "Why don't you send it to them?"

Ah, childhood! Thoughtless, heartless, prodigal childhood. It meant nothing to us to waste the food, and nothing either to mock the problem of world hunger with the callous suggestion of mailing our broccoli to Bangladesh. My family was far from rich, but we kids never knew real hunger even once. The joke would not have been nearly as funny if we had.

We were wise guys, but not wise. Not wise, but still smart enough to know that even if we had an address to mail food to; and even if we had a way to preserve the food in transit; still, the cost of the postage made the whole enterprise moot. Why spend \$40 to ship thirty cents' worth of asparagus to Timbuktu?

And here's the real shame: since I was a kid four decades ago, the problem has gotten even worse:

- In the last 40 years, the amount of food wasted per person has doubled in America.
- In our land, it is estimated that 30-40% of the food produced each year goes to waste.

- The food that is wasted would amply feed the hungry in our land.
- Thrown-out food is biggest part of the garbage in the average American household.
- Wasted food is a huge strain on the environment: a source of methane in our landfills, a waste of petroleum in its production and transport, and a stress on our water and sewage systems.
- Fruits and vegetables are the items most wasted, followed by dairy and grain products, with meat coming in third. (But wasted meat is the greatest strain on the environment.)
- The average American family loses \$1365-\$2275 each year in wasted food (NDRC Issue Paper, August 2012).
- Orthodox Christians are called to fast in Lent, in part so that they might share more generously with those in need. So here's a simple way to find more funds for your almsgiving without missing a single meal--*Waste less food.*

As with any issue, the first step is acknowledging the problem. Once you have done that in your family, you can move on to take some simple, easy steps.

- *Exercise Fridge and Freezer Discipline.* A crowded cooler makes it hard to see what's in there. Use Clean Monday to triage your refrigerator and freezer, sorting things that need to go in order to free up visibility for what needs to be used soon.
- *Prepare less food at meals and dish up smaller portions.* If people are still hungry, they can go for a piece of cheese or fruit or a bowl of cereal to round out the meal.
- *Do a waste audit.* For a couple of weeks, keep a list of what food gets tossed. From this you will learn how to adjust your shopping habits.
- *Make a list before shopping and stick to it.* Impulse purchases often hang around in the fridge until they are no longer good.
- *Learn what expiration dates really mean.* Expired food is very often still entirely edible.
- *Shop smaller.* The huge bag of oranges from Sam's Club is only a deal if you eat all of it. The Big-Box stores and their giant-sized packages make it too easy to waste food.
- *Find a way to compost your food scraps* instead of sending them down the disposal or into the landfill. Your garden will look better, too.
- *Learn the lost art of leftover usage.* The soups, stews, hashes, and casseroles of yesteryear were creative ways to use leftovers. (And if you're not boiling up leftover bones for broth, you are missing out on some crucial nutrition that you won't get elsewhere in your diet!)
- *Choose to have fewer options on hand.* This means another trip to the store each week perhaps, but surely you can combine that trip with another errand or activity. Duck into one of the smaller stores on the way home from the gym: you

might pay 10 cents extra for the milk, but by ensuring that you use all you buy, you will save money.

- *Patronize stores and businesses that work to reduce food waste.* The smaller health food store in East Lansing has bargain bins for dented canned goods and near-expiration produce and dairy; the big-chain health food store just dumps that stuff in its trash. So, choose wisely ...

You still cannot mail your uneaten food to the kids in Timbuktu. But by wasting less, you can bring some unspent grocery money to church for our second trays in Lent. In that way you can send your uneaten food to the hungry ... and the parish will even pay the postage to get it to them!

Waste not, so they might want not. And *Kali Sarakosti!* A Blessed Lenten Season to all!